

Navajo Reservoir Operations Environmental Impact Statement Update

Bureau of Reclamation

February 2001

Low-flow test delays EIS schedule

In July 2000, the Bureau of Reclamation canceled plans to conduct a low-flow test in the San Juan River below Navajo Reservoir to the confluence of the Animas River. The test had been scheduled for July 10-14. The 250 cubic feet per second (cfs) release, combined with the drought conditions and lower than normal water levels in the Animas River at that time, would not have left enough water in the river system for the habitat needs of the endangered Colorado pikeminnow and razorback sucker. Termination of the 2000 test resulted in delaying Reclamation's completion of the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for approximately 1 year. (See revised time line on page 3).

Reclamation plans to reschedule the low-flow test for late June or early July 2001, depending on the availability of water to meet the habitat needs of the endangered fishes. Releases from the reservoir will be reduced at incremental levels to a minimum of 250 cfs. This is approximately half the flow that is normally released from Navajo Reservoir during the summer.

Once the test commences, a wide array of data will be collected including:

- Aerial photography from Navajo Dam to the confluence of the Animas River
- Water temperature monitoring at six locations from the dam to the Hammond Diversion
- Assessment of physical changes in the river from the dam to the Animas River
- Flow data from several existing river gage stations

- Water quality samples
- Fisherman use and catch rates within the Quality Waters section of the San Juan River

The test will help determine some of the impacts low flows may have on the affected environment including river recreation and water quality, and on irrigation and water user diversion structures.

Public Meetings

Before the low-flow test is conducted, Reclamation plans to hold public meetings in both Farmington, New Mexico, and Bluff, Utah, to allow the public an opportunity to identify any issues or concerns they have about the low-flow test. These meetings will be held sometime this spring. Reclamation will announce the dates, times and location of the meetings via a news release.



Environmental Assessment to be Prepared on Low-flow Test

Reclamation will also prepare a draft environmental assessment describing the probable impacts of the proposed low-flow test on the affected environment. This environmental assessment should be available for public review and comment in late spring or early summer 2001.

As part of the environmental assessment process, you are invited to let us know of any issues and concerns you have associated with the proposed low-flow test. Your comments and concerns may be mailed to:

Bureau of Reclamation
Western Colorado Area Office
835 East Second Avenue,
Durango, CO 81301

E-mailed to klashmett@uc.usbr.gov

Please return comments to this office by
March 2, 2001

San Juan Fly Fishing Federation Meeting

Reclamation representatives will attend the February 20, 2001, San Juan Fly Fishing Federation meeting in Farmington, NM. They will provide an update on the Navajo Reservoir Operations EIS process and be available to answer questions. The meeting will be held at 7:30 p.m., at the Farmington Civic Center, 200 West Arrington.

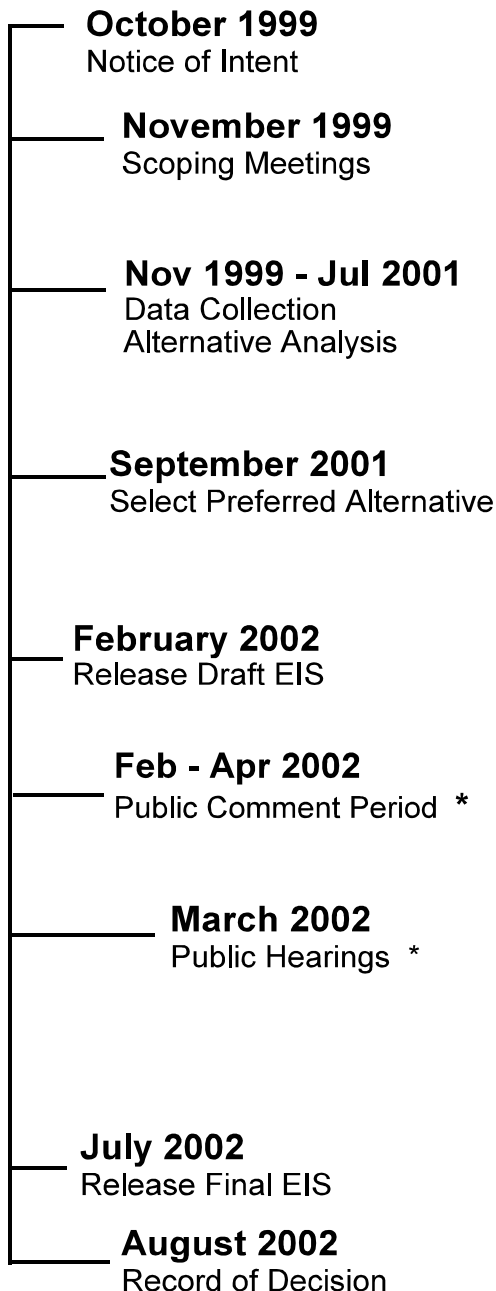
Trout Health Assessment Study

Since October 2000, Reclamation and the New Mexico State University Research Unit have been collecting data to evaluate the effects a 500 cfs winter flow may have on the health and conditions of the San Juan River trout fishery immediately below Navajo Dam. The investigation will continue through March 2001. The objective of the study is to compare the results of this winter's health of the trout fishery with a study that was conducted during the same 4-month period in 1996-97, but with flows of 250 cfs. Health of the trout fishery will be determined using the same stress indices measured in the 1996-97 study. Both studies include a health/condition profile, physiological changes in the fish, and feeding habits.



Team member examines a trout as part of the health assessment study

EIS Time Line



Cooperating Agencies

Reclamation continues to meet with the cooperating agencies who are assisting them in the Navajo Reservoir Operations EIS process. Some cooperators expressed concern about the accuracy of the hydrology model being used to model the EIS alternatives. As a result, an EIS hydrology sub-group consisting of Reclamation and cooperating agency representatives, meets regularly to discuss modeling issues.

Navajo Unit Reservoir Operations Meeting

On January 23, 2001, Reclamation staff held an operation coordination meeting for the Navajo Unit in Farmington, NM. The agenda included a status update on the EIS, a review of operations since August 2000, and a discussion of operations planned for the rest of this year. These meetings, held three times a year, provide an opportunity for federal, state, and local agencies and environmental and water user interests to come together and exchange information about what operational plans there are for the unit.



Some of the participants at the January 23rd Navajo Unit Operations Meeting

* Opportunity for formal public participation.

Who to Contact

If you have questions, need additional information, or want to be added to our Navajo Reservoir Operations EIS mailing list, contact:

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Information is also available at Reclamation's Internet web site: www.uc.usbr.gov (select Environmental Programs, Navajo Dam and Reservoir Site.)

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